



the family connection

News to use for families of young adolescents

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Not Yet

Since we remember our children when they were infants, toddlers, and grade schoolers, we think that by the time they are 12 and 13 years old they are rather “grown up.” While it is true they can now carry on a thoughtful conversation (when they so choose), plan and organize a project (though often at the last minute), and they generally seem older and wiser, don’t be fooled.

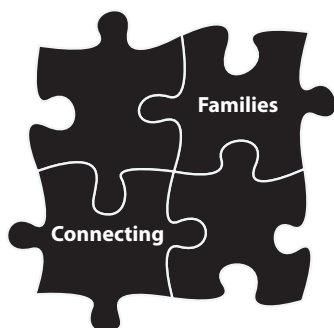
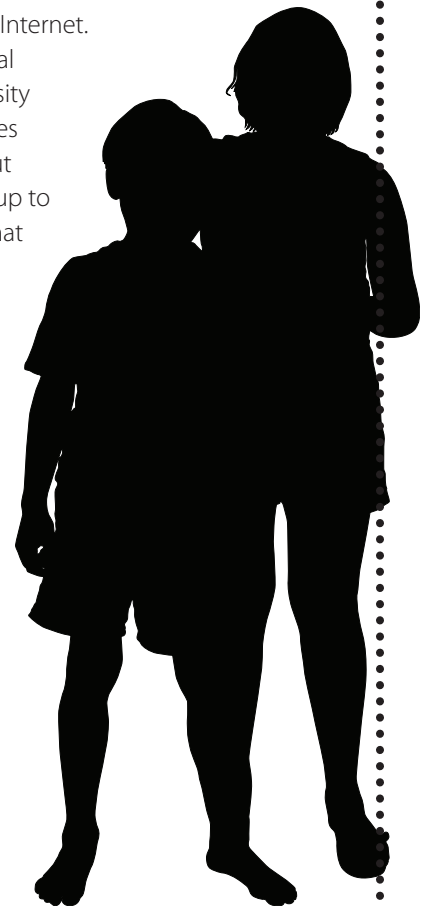
Young adolescents are just that—young and adolescent. They may be able to strike adult poses and beg to dress like college kids, but they are still quite young and not ready to be fully responsible for themselves, much less understand and deal with the complexities of the adult world without guidance from parents or guardians.

Do not believe, for example, that a middle schooler can understand sensitive relationship issues. If a parent and his or her spouse or partner are having personal difficulties, young adolescents should not be brought into the discussions. Questions that arise around these problems should be answered simply and without deep explanation. Do not draw your child into supporting one side or another. What is most important is maintaining a stable relationship with your child.

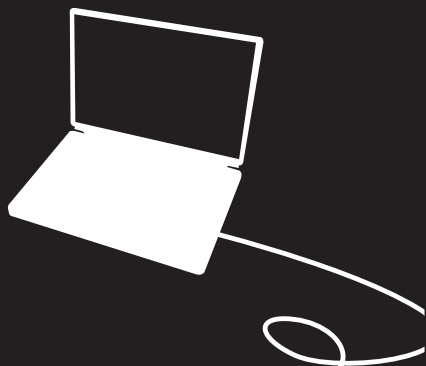
Young adolescents do not fully grasp the content of much of what they see on TV or read or hear on the news or over the Internet. They may act sophisticated, but sexual innuendoes, racial biases, and animosity toward certain lifestyles are sometimes repeated by middle schoolers without much clarity as to their meaning. It’s up to parents and guardians to monitor what they are seeing and hearing and to communicate the family’s values.

Young adolescents are still very concrete in their thinking, so take time to use down-to-earth examples to get your point across. More important, make sure there is plenty of time to listen and get at the real issues.

Though your young adolescent may seem quite responsible at times, there will be many more instances of irresponsible behavior, particularly when with friends. Do not be lulled by your child’s outside appearance. Each may look like a young adult, but the truth is, each still needs careful monitoring to grow safely into actual adulthood.



“Portfolio” is a word you might have heard your middle schooler and her teachers use. A student portfolio is simply a collection of a student’s work. It’s not a scrapbook; however, it contains examples of the student’s best work and should show growth in a particular concept or skill. Students and parents can use the portfolio to see improvement. When presented at a student-led conference, it can also open a discussion about future goals.



B-Cybersmart

According to research from Harvard Medical School, for every extra hour a teen spends watching TV or playing video games on an average day, he or she is 8 percent more likely to develop depression as an adult. Encourage your child to engage in social, academic, and athletic activities that are active and provide a sense of mastery and self-respect.

Factoid

When adults are asked about the top health issues facing children in their communities, they list the following:

- Obesity
- Drug abuse
- Smoking/Tobacco
- Bullying
- Internet safety

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll (August 2009)

You were wondering...

Summer break is coming soon and my child will have a lot of free time. Is that okay?

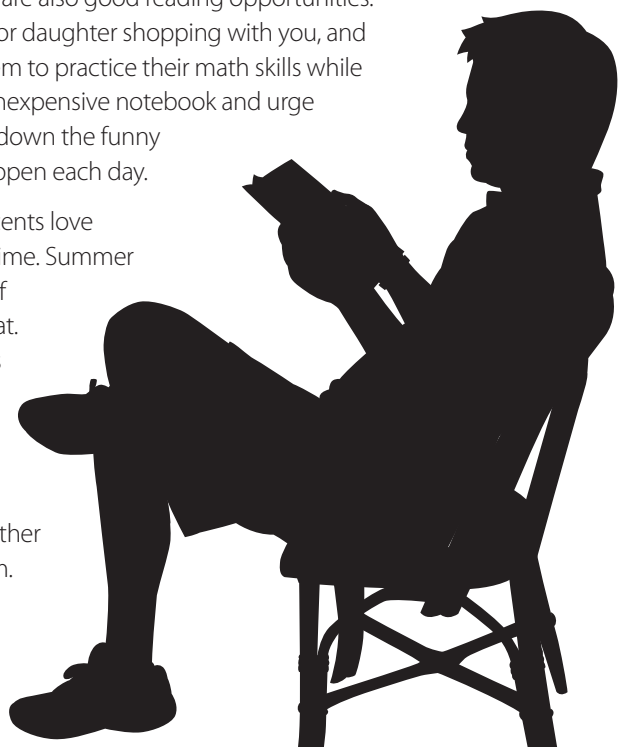
You are a wise parent to be thinking about the summer before it is full upon you! This is a good time to plan with your young adolescent so that summer will be fun and productive.

On your side, you should be clear that there will be limits and requirements: limited screen time (including phone, text, TV, video games, and all other passive entertainment), limited time unsupervised (if you work, you can call in regularly or have a neighbor check in), and required participation in family activities (chores, meals, family nights, family get-togethers).

Talk with your middle schooler about his or her expectations: Will he or she be playing on a team? Will he or she work (babysitting, yard work, assisting in a daycare)? Will he or she be performing community service? Extra sleep is certainly okay, as is spending time with friends, as long as the above limits are honored. And remember, exercise improves brain function!

Finally, encourage your child to read at least half an hour every day. Make sure there is reading material available. It doesn't have to be a book—magazines, newspapers, or other non-fiction (science, sports, nature) are also good reading opportunities. Take your son or daughter shopping with you, and encourage them to practice their math skills while there. Buy an inexpensive notebook and urge them to write down the funny things that happen each day.

Young adolescents love unstructured time. Summer provides lots of chances for that. Planning helps to ensure that the unstructured time is an opportunity rather than a problem.



The Family Connection is published by National Middle School Association as part of its ongoing commitment encouraging family and community involvement in the education of young adolescents. NMSA is unique among educational organizations because of its commitment to addressing the needs of middle level students—youth ages 10 to 15. Membership in NMSA is open to all persons interested in and concerned about middle level education. Teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, college students, and other educational professionals are well represented in NMSA's membership. Call 1-800-528-NMSA to receive further information about membership and middle level resources.

About the Editor: Judith Baenen, a former classroom teacher, speaks and writes about middle grades students and the issues that affect them. She is author of National Middle School Association's pamphlets for families of middle grades students *HELP* and *More HELP*.